



STATE OF IOWA

CHESTER J. CULVER, GOVERNOR
PATTY JUDGE, LT. GOVERNOR

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
CHARLES J. KROGMEIER, DIRECTOR

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DHS Focuses on Reducing Restraints; Cherokee Nets Award

DES MOINES, Iowa – The Mental Health Institute at Cherokee will be recognized Wednesday as one of the nation's leaders in reducing the use of restraints and seclusions, which can be dangerous to both staff and patients.

"We still have very difficult and sometimes dangerous people to deal with, but employees at all four of our mental health institutes have proven that they can recognize and defuse most situations without resorting to physical restraints or isolation," said Charles Krogmeier, director of the Iowa Department of Human Services.

For many years restraints and seclusions were common at mental health facilities, including DHS-managed institutes in Cherokee, Independence, Mount Pleasant, and Clarinda. In addition to occasionally causing injuries, research showed that the practice had minimal value in changing behavior.

Krogmeier said restraints are now a last resort.

At Cherokee, the rate of restraints and seclusions has dropped by 98 percent in the last decade.

In 2008, there were 0.29 hours of restraints or seclusions per 1,000 inpatient hours, compared to 20 hours in 1999. Thirty-seven patients were either restrained or secluded in 2008, with the total number of hours being 77. Ten years earlier, there were 237 patients who spent 7,899 hours in restraints or seclusion.

The achievement at Cherokee will be recognized Wednesday (March 31) by the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, which said that Cherokee is one of ten facilities nationwide to lead the way in alternatives to restraints. Superintendent Dan Gillette will be in Washington D.C. to accept the award.

Krogmeier said the main strategy is to recognize and neutralize behaviors—known as "triggers"—that could otherwise escalate to dangerous situations. Triggers and calming techniques are developed for each patient.

Early staff resistance at Cherokee, he said, was overcome by proof that alternatives to restraints and seclusions actually reduce staff injuries.

In 2001, there were 69 staff injuries related to restraints and seclusions at Cherokee, compared to just nine in 2008. Overall staff injuries dropped from 355 to 150 during that time.

"This award reflects the incredible level of dedication of the staff at Cherokee all the way from the bottom to the top. This kind of thing can only be achieved through the deepest sense of teamwork," said Gillette.

The other awardees are in Massachusetts, Oregon, Illinois, and Nevada.